

that will provide much needed transparency to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation process of examining and resolving bank failures.

Not only is this an issue that has severely impacted the wellbeing of my state of Georgia, but this Nation is suffering as a whole.

There are some communities across the country that are no longer have a bank to serve them and will continue to suffer on their economic development efforts because the sole bank in their community has failed.

Since 2008 there has been over 400 bank failures nationwide. Seventy of those failures have occurred in Georgia. This year alone 18 banks in Georgia have failed.

While that represents over 27 percent of all the banks in my State, this is not just a Georgia issue.

There are nine other States that have extraordinarily high rates of failures including: Florida, Illinois, California, Minnesota, Washington, Michigan, Nevada, Missouri, and Arizona.

Unfortunately, there will continue to be bank failures in this country and this bill will provide the Congress with information about the underlying fundamentals that cause these failures.

The bill directs the FDIC IG, in consultation with Treasury and Federal Reserve IGs to study FDIC policies and practices with regard to Loss Share Agreements; the fair application of regulatory capital standards; appraisals; FDIC procedures for loan modifications; and the FDIC's handling of Consent Orders and Cease and Desist Orders.

Further, the GAO will be directed to a study those questions the FDIC IG is unable to fully explore such as the causes of the high number of bank failures; procyclical impact of fair value accounting; analysis of the impact of failures on the community; and, the overall effectiveness of loss share agreements for resolving banks.

The swift passage of this legislation by the House of Representatives in July was a rare instance of bipartisan support and a sincere acknowledgement to the American people that bank failures on the whole need to be carefully considered by the Congress.

The FDIC does a commendable job of ensuring that depositors at banks they regulate are going to be able to access their money in the event of a bank failure.

I want the FDIC to know that their good work does not go unnoticed by this body, however it is clear that Congress needs more information about the underlying causes of these bank failures and it is imperative that the US Congress send a clear message that "if there is a better way, then we must pursue it."

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning busi-

ness, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCHES

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, over the years, I have visited dozens of schools in Illinois, and I have learned more about the childhood obesity problem in this country by stepping into the lunch room than I have just about anywhere else. Particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods, school staff tell me that while students might pick up a piece of fruit or a serving of vegetables, the first food choice for the majority of students is a large soda and a bag of flaming hot cheetos. But for the young people we are asking to perform at ever increasing academic levels, we should be able to provide better options for their meals.

Last year, Congress took a big step including provisions to improve school lunches in the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. The U.S. Department of Agriculture deserves credit for taking the first significant steps in 15 years to make school lunches healthier. These proposed changes would provide children with a balanced diet that includes more green leafy vegetables, limiting starchy vegetables—like french fries—to two servings a week, limiting sodium, and boosting whole grains. USDA also proposed that tomato paste could only be counted as a vegetable if a half cup of tomato paste is used. Today, only two tablespoons of tomato paste is considered a serving of a vegetable which means schools can serve pizza to fulfill a vegetable requirement and receive Federal subsidies for doing so.

I was dismayed to learn that the conferees for the Fiscal Year 2012 Agriculture Appropriations legislation have decided to slow or even stop some of the new proposed nutrition standards for school meals. The USDA's proposal is science-based and informed by 2009 recommendations from the Institute of Medicine to reduce childhood obesity and future health care costs. Rather than uphold these sound recommendations to promote children's nutrition, the conferees report will roll back these standards and continue the status quo.

But maintaining the status quo comes at a heavy cost. Federal subsidies will support a school lunch menu that is heavy on french fries and pizza, ignoring nutrition science and common sense while contributing to our country's childhood obesity epidemic. These policy riders will maintain the current standards.

Across the country school districts are showing that with creativity and determination it is possible to improve school meals on a limited budget. Two years ago Chicago Public Schools made a commitment to try to wean kids off the junk food they have grown accustomed to and has moved to improve nu-

trition standards in school lunches and breakfasts. Flaming hot cheetos are still popular but no longer ubiquitous. The school district has exceeded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Healthier U.S. School Challenge Gold Standards and is offering more fruits and vegetables, and serving more whole grains. CPS now has one of the healthiest nutrition standards in the Nation. There is certainly more work to be done, but the school district has shown how to implement healthier meals on a limited budget and should be hailed as a national leader for affordably delivering healthy food to children.

I am deeply disappointed that the conferees have decided to resist implementing better nutrition standards in our schools, rather than fighting to reduce childhood obesity among our children. I am disappointed that the voice of powerful interest groups drowned out basic nutritional science and collaborating on strategies to improve children's options at lunch time.

TRIBUTE TO MS. RUTH SMITH

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I stand today to congratulate an extraordinary Kentucky woman and a dear friend of mine, Ms. Ruth Smith. Ruth was recently one of nine to receive this year's distinguished UK Sanders-Brown Center on Aging Foundation's Senior Star Award, an award given each year to those who exemplify graceful aging by remaining engaged in an active lifestyle. Ruth, now 86, was recognized for her great character and outstanding service to her community during this year's Senior Star Award luncheon, which took place on October 13, 2011, in Lexington, KY.

Ruth, a longtime resident of Wayne County, KY, is an active member of the Lake Cumberland Area Development District, a quasi-governmental agency comprised of local city and county governments, and special districts in south-central Kentucky to improve life for the region's citizens. Ruth has served as a member of the LCADD's board of directors since 1993 and has served as a member of the executive committee since 2003. In 2008, Ruth was named LCADD Citizen Board Member of the Year for her exceptional work.

Currently, the LCADD serves the counties of Adair, Casey, Clinton, Cumberland, Green, McCreary, Pulaski, Russell, Taylor and Wayne by providing a regional forum to local governments to help identify issues and opportunities and then provide leadership in planning and implementing programs that will help improve the quality of life of the region's citizens.

Over the years, Ruth's strength of character, adventurous spirit, and care for her fellow man have been a constant echo throughout the many successes she has enjoyed in her life. During World War II, Ruth traveled from her home in Pennsylvania to California to work in a factory—her personal contribution to the war effort. Some years